

Gender, Age and Length of Relationship as Factors Affecting Sexual Self Disclosure among Heterosexual Adolescents in Nigeria.

¹Ogunleye, Adedeji J., ²Balogun, Shyngle K.

¹*Department of Psychology Faculty of the Social Sciences Ekiti State University P. M. B. 5363 Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.*

²*Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences University of Botswana P. B. 0022, Gaborone, Botswana*

Abstract: *The study examined some social-psychological factors that affect sexual self disclosure among heterosexual adolescents in Nigeria. A sample of 172 University undergraduates comprising of 70 males and 102 females in the age bracket of 19 to 34 years were used. Using the independent t-test statistic, it was found out that age or sex is not a significant factor influencing sexual self disclosure. However, findings revealed that length of intimate relationship is a significant factor that influences sexual self disclosure [$t(159) = 2.52; p < .05$]. Findings are therefore discussed in light of available literature and it is recommended that sexual self assertiveness skill acquisition should be taught adolescents in schools and homes to help them communicate sexual needs and initiate sexual behavior with intimate partners. It is assumed that such skills would help adolescents live a fulfilled marital life in later years and improve the effectiveness of preventive programmes for adolescents' sexual risk taking behaviors.*

Keywords: *Intimate Relationship, Sexual Self-Disclosure, Adolescents, Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Adolescents sexuality in real life has been widely explored in past researches on such subjects as sexual attitudes [Besharov and Gardiner, 1997] sexual orientation, homosexuality and sexual knowledge [Fisher and Misovich, 1990; Chug and Vargas, 1999], sexual behaviors [Ogunleye and Adebayo 2005] and sex education [Abler and Sedlacet, 1989; Fishbein, Middle stad and Hitchcock, 1994]. Also, human sexuality on the internet is a griming research area in the social sciences with a few studies addressing the subject of adolescents' cybersex [e.g. Lo and Wei, 2005].

Previous perspectives on sexual relationships proposed that self disclosure and intimacy of relationships are synonymous, and that self-disclosure can function as an indicator of intimacy in interpersonal relations [Jourard, 1971]. Jourard (1971), Rogers (1970) and Altman and Taylor (1973) have posited that when interpersonal interactions turns into intimate relationship, breath of self disclosure expands and its depth enters self-core. McNeil and Byers [1997, 2005] also affirmed that the higher the length of an intimate relationship, the more the sexual self disclosure. Whereas, Derlega and Chaikin (1977) posited that individuals do not usually engage in self disclosure with one another until they are confident that they have formed a 'dyadic boundary', ensuring that information disclosed by one is not leaked by the other to mutual acquaintances. Derlega, Metts, Petronios, and Margulis (1993) defined sexual self disclosure as the willingness to reveal intimate facts and feelings. It is the extent to which individuals reveal personal information about themselves as they relate to others (Jourard and Lasakow, 1958).

Deaux, Dane and Wrightsman (1993) pointed out that in real life, it is more likely that our closer friends tend to get involved in the process of self disclosure. While Wallace (2001) argued that in the environment of cyberspace, self disclosure might occur in a different manner because, whereas the real life makes identification easily accomplished, the cyberspace is often an environment of anonymity, privacy, and deindividuation; where one's personal identification is hidden and self awareness is diminished.

The Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship theory (FIRO) (Schutz, 1958), concentrates on three interpersonal needs that most people share: the needs for inclusion, for control, and for affection. Schutz maintains that people begin relationships in order to satisfy one or more of these needs. Altman and Taylor (1973) in their Social Penetration Theory maintains that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more personal ones. They believe that each opinion, belief, prejudice, and obsession is layered around and within the individual. According to these scholars, as people get to know each other, the layers "shed away" to reveal the core of the person. As a relationship develops

therefore, the partners share more aspects of the self, providing breadth as well as depth, through an exchange of information, feelings and activities. According to Altman and Taylor, relationships are sustained when they are relatively rewarding and discontinued when they are relatively costly.

This theory seems to pertain to real world experiences, however, Altman and Taylor may have abandoned several main factors that influence self disclosure. Gender, race, ethnic background, and even age could greatly influence findings and may contribute to the rate at which the onion is "shed".

Altman and Taylor [1973] while addressing the subject of adolescents' cybersex, also argued that individuals will be more likely to self disclose sexual information to intimate partners in real life and Wallace [2001] and Mckenna, Green and Gleason (2002) posited that personal identification on the internet is anonymous and therefore can produce greater intimacy and closeness arising from a deindividuation state. Such deindividuation state may bring about a disinhibition of ones antinormative behavior, according to Postmes and Spears (1998). This suggests that it may be more likely that one self disclose sexual information more freely on the internet than in real-life. Derlega et al (1993) noted that there are clear dangers in disclosing personal information, such as the risk of ridicule or outright rejection by one's friends and families. Nonetheless, such danger may be more pronounced when self disclosure is done in a face to face interaction. Therefore, sexual self disclosure on the internet may not depend on the intimacy or length of relationship as it is often presumed to be in real life. With regard to self disclosure in real life, the consistent findings of previous researches have been that females are more willing than males to provide profound self disclosure to others (Caldwell and Preplan, 1982; Dindia and Allen, 1992; Reisman, 1990). But the question that arises from the above positions is:

*Can it always be true that females are more willing to self disclose (even sexual information) and across cultures?

*In real life, can sexual self disclosure be dependent on length of relationship?

*Can age of intimate partners have anything to do with their sexual self disclosure?

Attempts at answering the posed questions lead to the formulation of the hypotheses that:

- i. There will be a significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of heterosexual adolescent males and females in Nigeria.
- ii. Length of intimate relationships will be a significant factor affecting sexual self disclosure of heterosexual adolescents in Nigeria.
- iii. Adolescents who are older will be more willing to disclosure sexuality issues than their younger counterparts.

II. Methods

Research Design: This study is a survey research adopting the independent groups design. The design makes it possible to compare the groups on the variables of interest (i.e. Gender, length of intimate relationship, and age).

Research Participants: A total number of 172 respondents comprising of 70 males and 102 females, randomly selected from among the undergraduate students of the University of Ado – Ekiti, Nigeria were used. Participants' age ranges from 19 to 34 years with a mean age of 28.2 years.

Measures: A questionnaire comprising of two sections was used for the study. Section A of the questionnaire consisted of questions to tap information about participants' age, gender, and length of intimate relationship while section B consisted of the revised sexual self disclosure scale designed by Snell (1989). The scale consists of 172 items that form 24 three items subscale. Research participants responses ranges from (1) I would be slightly willing to discuss sexual topic with an intimate partner to (4) I would be completely willing to discuss sexual topic with an intimate partner. A cronbach alpha reliability co-efficient of .97 was recorded for this scale in the present study. Participants scores on the scale are added to obtain total score on the measure. The higher the score on the scale, the more a participants' willingness to disclosure sexual information.

Procedure For Data Collection

A trained research assistant was employed by these researchers to administer the questionnaire to the research participants and retrieve same. In all, two hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered but only two hundred and fourteen were retrieved. Of the retrieved 214, only one hundred and seventy two (172) representing about 80.3% were analyzed because some of the retrieved questionnaires were inappropriately filled

III. Results

The results of the analyzed data are presented below:

Table 1.0: t-test table showing the effect of Sex, Age and Length of Intimate Relationships on Sexual Self Disclose of Heterosexual Adolescents in Nigeria.

Variables		N	Mean (X)	STD	df	T	P
Sex	Male	70	193.77	48.55	169	0.42	>.05
	Female	101	190.14	58.23			
Age	0-2 yrs	104	193.38	54.61	169	0.52	>.05
	Above 28 yrs	67	188.91	54.25			
Length of Intimate Relationships	> = 3	81	203.19	57.93	159	2.52	<.05
	< = 3	80	182.09	47.92			

From the above table, it is revealed that males and females do not significantly differ in their sexual self disclosure' willingness [t (169) = 0.42, P>.05]; age is not a significant factor affecting sexual self disclosure [t (169) = 0.52, P>.05]; but length of intimate relationships is a significant factor affecting sexual self disclosure [t (159) = 2.52; P<.05].

IV. Discussion

The first hypothesis derived from the findings of Macneil and Byers (1997, 2005), Reisman (1990), and Dindia and Allen (1992) who concluded that females are higher on their level of self disclosure than their male counterparts generally. Results of data analyses however revealed that there was no significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of heterosexual adolescent males and females in Nigeria. This finding corroborates the findings of Walsh (1991) who found no significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of heterosexual adolescent males and females in Hispanic community. However, Chiou and Wan (2006) also found out that among Taiwanese adolescents, male adolescents' sexual self disclosure is greater and higher than those of female adolescents. The inconsistency in findings here may not be unconnected with socio-cultural differences and the value system in environments of study.

Traditionally, women were expected to follow moral principles, value self esteem and save their virginity for marriage. Such traditional expectations may therefore caution them in freely expressing sexual desires, less they are tempted to be involved in intimate sexual activities, lose their virginity, and get stigmatized and labeled as 'whore'. However, the changing value system and enlightenments may have impacted traditional beliefs about sexuality around the world and therefore inform the sexes about sexual equality, liberation of sex attitude, and freedom of expressions. Thus, it may be expected that both male and female adolescents will disclose sexual escapades without reservations owing to the changing value system resultant from globalization ideas and education.

A test of hypothesis two revealed that length of intimate relationship is a significant factor of sexual self disclosure. This finding corroborates those of Macneil and Byers (1997,2005) which affirmed that the longer the length of intimate relationship, the more the sexual self disclosure of dating partners. Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco (1998) also noted that considerable research on intimate relationships has shown that both self disclosure and partner disclosure increase the experience of intimacy in interactions. Mckeena et al (2002) argued that disclosing quite intimate information about oneself normally occurs only after liking and trust have been established between relationship partners. Such, of course, is only a matter of time. Altman and Taylor (1973) also posited that partners share more aspects of the self, providing breath as well as depth, through an exchange of information feelings and activities; thus sustaining the relationship as they stay longer together and develop their relationship.

Further, from the perspective of relationship development, communication experiences which communicators experience is usually in terms of changes in their intimacy level. Therefore, it seem evident that the longer intimate partners are in their relationship, the more the willingness to self disclosure, even sexual topics.

Hypothesis three revealed that there was no significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of adolescents who are older (i.e above 28years) and those who are younger (i.e. below 28years). This finding contradicts the findings of Alan Guttmacher Institute (1994) which found out that age differences between partners contribute to sexual self disclosure. They ascertained that many young adolescent women often have male partners who are five to ten years older than they are, and this tendency contributes to the risk of teenage pregnancy because the young people do not even know that they have sexual rights, let alone know how to assert them or freely discuss their sexual escapades without fear of molestation.

V. Conclusion And Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that length of intimate relationship is a significant factor influencing the willingness to self disclose sexual related matters among intimate adolescents. This may be particularly so because according to a Yoruba (South-Western Nigeria) adage, “*Oku Odun meta kuro ni ajeji saare*” (Meaning a corpse, that has been buried for an upward of three years is no longer an alien in the land of the dead).

This means that intimate partners that have been together for quite sometimes ought to be freer to one another in all areas. Alan Guttmacher Institutes (1994), in the *Journal of Adolescence*, volume 17, issue number 2, pages 137 to 148, submitted that intimate partners must know how to assert themselves. Ogunleye and Oke (2012) also found out that a significant factor of sexual self disclosure is sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness means a person’s ability to communicate sexual needs and initiate sexual issues with a partner (Shafer, 1997). Suffice here to say that it is possible for intimate partners to have stayed together for quite sometimes and yet be unable to disclose sexual issues freely if they are not sexually assertive. This may explain why a younger female adolescent dating a five to ten years older male partner may not be able to self disclose sexual desires and activities freely with the partner.

It is therefore recommended that sexual self assertiveness and other sexuality education should be included in schools curricular for adolescents to learn about the necessary skills involved in sexuality and sex related issues.

Non- governmental organizations too should not relent in their efforts of organizing seminars on how to live a fulfilled marital life.

Parents, as important agents of socialization, should endeavour to train and teach their children sexuality issues from homes to guide them from embarrassments arising from ignorance about sexuality issues. Ministries and other government agencies should also concern themselves with creating functional marriage units to address sexual related havocs in our societies; since it is evident that marriages often break owing to lack of sexual self disclosure (Price and Kunz, 2003).

References

- [1] Abler, R. M. and Sedlacet, W. E. (1989). Freshmen Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour over a 15-year period. *Journal of College Students Development*, 30, 201-209.
- [2] Adler, N.L., and Hendrick, S.S. (1991). Relationships between contraceptive behaviour and love attitudes, sex attitudes, and self-esteem. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 70, 302-308.
- [3] Altman, I., and Taylor D.A [1973]. *Social penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- [4] Besharov, D. and Gardiner, K. N. (1997). Trends in Teens Sexual Behaviour. *Children and Youth Services Behaviour Review*, 19, 341-368
- [5] Brafford-Squires, L. (1998). *Sexual Self-Esteem and its Relationship to Demographics, Sexual History, Relationship Context, and Condom Use in College Students* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 1998). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 59(6-A), 19-30.
- [6] Caldwell, M.A and Peplau, L.A. (1982). Sex Differences in Same-Sex Friendship. *Sex Roles*, 8(7), 721-732.
- [7] Chiou, Wen-Bin and Wan, Chin-Sheng (2006). Sexual self disclosure among Taiwanese adolescents: Gender differences and interplay of cyberspace and real life. *Cyber Psychology and Behaviour*, 9(1) 46-53.
- [8] Chug, L. C. and Vargas, G. J. (1999). Sexual Risk Taking Among Gay Men. *CDC AIDS Surveillance*, April, 2003.
- [9] Cubbin, C., Santelli, J., Brindis, C.D., & Braveman, P. (2005). Neighborhood context and sexual behaviors among adolescents: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 37, 125-134.
- [10] Deaux, K., Dane, F.C., and Wrightsman, L.S. (1993). *Social Psychology in the 1990s*. (6th Edition). Pacific grove, CA: Brooks and Cole.
- [11] Dindia, K., & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 106-124.
- [12] Falaye, O. A. (2004). Predictive factors influencing the sexual behavior of adolescents. *IfePsychologiA*, 12(2), 17-26.
- [13] Fishbein, M., Middle stad, S. E. and Hitchcock, P. J. (1994). Using Information to Change Sexually Transmitted Related Behaviours. In R. J. Clemente and J. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Preventing AIDS: Theories and Methods of Behavioural Intervention* (Pgs. 61-78). New York: Plenum Press.
- [14] Fisher, J. D. and Misovich, S. J. (1990). Evolution of College Students AIDS Related Behavioral Responses, Attitudes, Knowledge, and Fear. *AIDS Education and Prevention*, 2(4), 322-337.
- [15] Frankowski, B.L. (2004). Sexual orientation and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 113(6), 1827-1832.
- [16] Haavio-Mannila, E. and Koutula, O. (1997). Correlates of increased sexual satisfaction. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 26, 399-419.
- [17] Hale, V.E. and Strassberg, D.S. (1990). The role of anxiety on sexual arousal. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 19, 569-581.
- [18] Jourard, S.M. (1971). *Self-disclosure: An experimental analysis of the transparent self*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- [19] Jourard, S.M. and Lasakow, P. (1958). Some factors in self disclosure. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 56(1), 91-98.
- [20] Laurenceau, J. P., Barrett, L. F., and Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 74, 1238-1251.
- [21] Lo, V. and Wei, R. (2005). Exposure to Internet pornography and Taiwanese adolescents' sexual attitudes and behavior. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 49(2), 221-237.
- [22] MacNeil, S. and Byers, E.S. (1997). The relationships between sexual problems, communication, and sexual satisfaction. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 6, 277-283.
- [23] MacNeil, S., and Byers, E.S. (2005). Dyadic assessment of sexual self disclosure and sexual satisfaction in heterosexual dating couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22, 169-181.

- [24] Mckeena, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., and Gleason, M. E. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the internet: what is the big attraction. *Journal of social issues*, 58(1), 9-31.
- [25] Mona. L.R., Krause, J.S., Norris, F.H., Cameron, R.P., Kalichman, S.C., and Lesondak, L.M. (2000). Sexual expression following spinal cord injury. *Neuro Rehabilitation*, 15, 121-131.
- [26] Moore, S. and Rosenthal, D. (1991). Adolescent invulnerability and perceptions of AIDS risk. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 6, 164-180.
- [27] Ogunleye, A. J. and Adebayo, S. O. (2005). HIV/AIDS and Condom Usage Among Heterosexual University Students in South-Western Nigeria. *Ago Iwoye Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 1(2), 14-21.
- [28] Ogunleye, A.J. and Oke, S.O. (2012). Effect of Sexual Self Assertiveness and Sexual Self Esteem on Sexual Self Disclosure among Heterosexual Adolescents in Nigeria. *Elixir journal of social sciences*, 47, 8817-8820.
- [29] Postmes, T. and Spears, R. (1998). Deindividuation and antinormative behavior: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 123(3), 238-259.
- [30] Price, C. and Kunz, J. (2003). Rethinking the paradigm of juvenile delinquency as related to divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 39 (1-2), 109-133.
- [31] Reisman, J. M. (1990). Intimacy in same-sex friendship. *Sex Roles*, 23, 65-80
- [32] Rogers, C.R. (1990). *Carl Rogers on encounter groups*. New York: Harper And Row.
- [33] Schutz, W.C. (1958). *FIRO: A three dimensional Theory of Interpersonal Behaviour*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- [34] Shafer, D.A. (1997). *The development and validation of a sexual assertiveness scale*. Unpublished master's thesis, California State University, California
- [35] Snell, William E, (1989) Development and validation of the masculine behavior scale: A measure of behaviours stereotypically attributed to males and females. *Sex Roles* 21 (11-12).
- [36] Wallace, P.M. (2001). *The Psychology of the Internet*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [37] Walsh, A. (1991). Self Esteem and Sexual Behaviour: Exploring Gender Differences. *Sex Roles*. 25, 441-450.